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MY YEARS AS A "HEFFTLING"
1942 - 1945
HANKA STEARN, SZYKMAN.

" I SHALL CRY FOR YOU, AND MISS YOU FOREVER "

MY DEAR FATHER DAVID

MY BELOVED MOTHER LEA

לזיכרם של הורינו ובני משפחותינו שנספו בשואה:

אבינו חיים שלמה שיקמן

אמנו שפרינצה שיקמן

אחותנו ינקה שיקמן

אחינו יחזקאל, מרדכי, ואלטר־דוד שנספה ביחד עם אשתו לאה וילדיהם **שרה ויהודה**

גיסתנו, פייגלה שיקמן עם בתה **חייה־שרה (סושיא) בת חונא**

המנציחות:

אסתר פרנקל מבית שיקמן ומשפ'

פלה מילשטיין מבית שיקמן ומשפ'

חונָא שיקמן

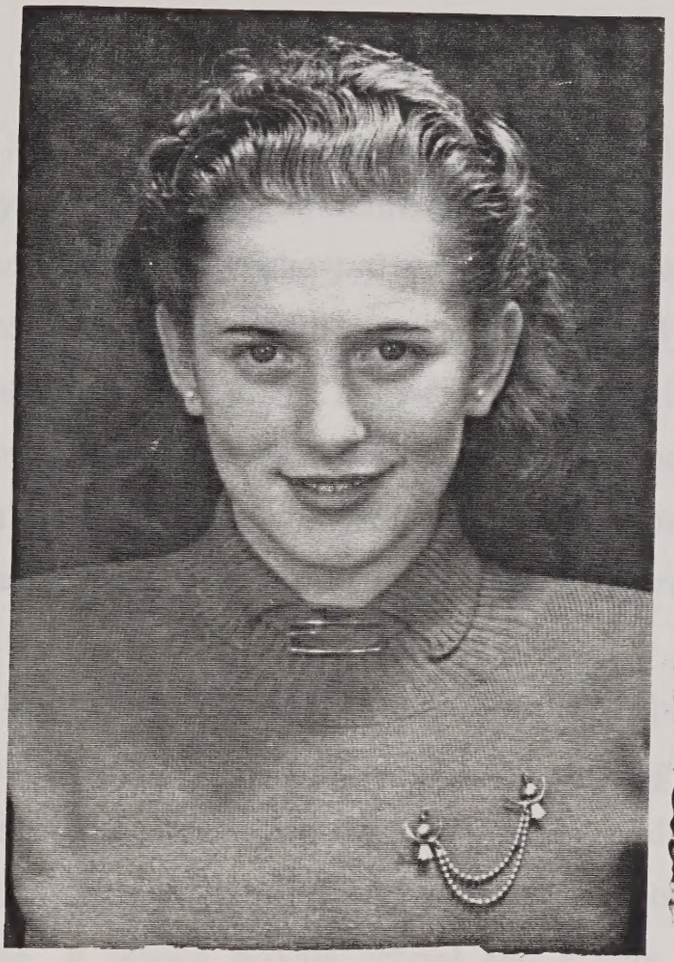
91 BUBIE, ZAIDY
UNCLE MOTEK
AUNTE YANKA

MY SWEET SISTER
SALA

MY ADORING
BROTHER IDEK

TWO SURVIVORS MY SISTER MILA

1946 MILA



HANKA + MILA
1946

HANKA 1947

HANKA 1946

1946 HANKA

Today is prima Aprilis. How many memories this brings back, a half a century has gone by. As far as I can remember I always wanted to write , since my earliest days. Somehow the were always excuses; tomorrow , a day after, next week I will start. Well, I finally made a resolution. This first of April will mark my beginning , I will start, I will write as it comes to my mind . All the past 50 years will be brought to life again , so my children and grandchildren and generations to come will know and learn about my past, of those traumatic years of the holocaust .

I was born in Chorzow, Poland, population 50 000 people. This was a coal mining town in Upper Silesia , before 1914 it belonged to Germany. The town, as I can remember was very nice and modern, large stores with beautiful dressed windows, swimming pool, indoor ice skating rink, of course a Jewish private school and a very large and impressive synagogue. My biggest fascination were the four movie houses on the main street and I was a faithful patron. My parents were running a kosher restaurant, the only one in town, life was good and comfortable.

You may wonder why April 1st is so significant to me. First of all, my dear brother Idek was born on this date, in 1929. We were already two girls in the family, my sister Sala, older by 14 months, who I adored and loved beyond words. When my brother was born, my proud father was boasting to the neighbors (who spoke German) . "My wife gave birth to a baby boy " but they were laughing , "Mr. .Szykman don't fool us ,we know it is Prima Aprilis " (April Fool's day). Well it was true, my baby brother was for real.

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November 1992

On this rainy, and gloomy November 11th, my hearth is filled with sadness, and such aching longing, for my beloved sister Sala. Today would have been her birthday, I can't believe she would have been 69 years old. The last time I saw her was on September 1942 in Bendzin, Poland.

On that warm September morning I left for work to a German factory, producing uniforms for the Wermacht. The day was shiny and bright, you felt that everything would be all right.

I was only 15, but on my identification papers I was 16, the age to start working .

Sitting at the sewing machine, with the very heavy blanket-like fabric, my fingers were simply breaking, mastering to hold on to the garment. Heaven forbid to break a needle, you were punished or threatened. In spite of it all, I managed to sew and day-dream.

The sewing bench was a perfect escape from my daily life, which became very frightening and insecure, with constant raids, and "selections". My beloved mother was taken away from us a week ago. She was rounded up on the street, while waiting for peasants , arriving from the farms , and selling their milk products. This was the only way she could feed her children, a little cheese, some butter a few eggs, a quart of milk if she was lucky. The ration of food given to us was very poor, we were always hungry.

My sweet and beloved mother was only 39 years old when she was so brutally taken away from us, she was one among other Jewish mothers who where also waiting to buy some food for their hungry children. They were all taken to a deserted building , which was once a school house, to await their future.

Every day after work I used to go to a neighbouring building , which overlooked the court yard, where she was marching in circles with

all the other prisoners. I used to throw down letters and parcels of food. She looked up and saw me, I was waving frantically with my hands, and blowing kisses , while crying hysterically.

She could not hear me or see my tears. It was such a pity, seeing her so vulnerable, so skinny and fragile she looked 70 years old, my heart was breaking.

My mother (only a year earlier) was such a beauty with her delicate features , slim, medium height , fantastic black mane of hair, she wore braided around her hat, or sometimes in a French bun. At night before she went to sleep, she let her hair down , which went bellow her waist, I marveled at this wonder, a black ocean of waves , she brushed it and brushed it, and I watched and watched. My mother had green eyes, sometimes hazel, sometimes brownish, they expressed a lot of warmth and kindness at the same time they revealed so much pain. The eyes were asking , why? why? why?.

Today my daydreams will be happy I was thinking. I shall go to the usual place to see my beloved mommy, but she will be already released and waiting for me at home, there will be laughter , hugs and kisses, we will be together again, a family again, united at last.

How little I knew. Right after work we were told to line up in the huge court yard, for roll call. None of us thought different.

We were about 200 hundred girls working in the factory , we considered ourselves very useful, and important after all we were dressing the Wermacht. They need us, they will keep us till the end of the war.We were terribly wrong. We were piled in large military trucks, just the way we were, dressed lightly, on this still warm September day, and shipped to Sosnowice, to a transfer camp. After a week we were send to different work camps.

My shattered dream, I never came home, again, never saw my

beloved mother, my handsome father, our neighbors called him Clark Gable, he had just turned 41 years. My loving sister Sala, and my brother Idek, he was just Bar Mitzvah. I never, never, saw them again. What started as such a promising day turned to an everlasting tragedy. My precious little baby sister Mila, age 10 survived by sheer miracle. She was cared for by our Gentile housekeeper Cela, who loved her like her own child. From a family of six, only two of us survived.

September 1942 Spytkowice, Poland.

We stayed in Dulak, the transfer camp, for one week. Once again we were full of hope and expectations.

The Dulak was a very large brick building, a school without students, deserted not by choice; this used to be a Jewish high school.

The large court yard was waiting for new victims. we were marching in circles for hours and hours. We went through medical examination, to make sure we were healthy and able. We were able to receive mail and parcels from home, we were only 30 minutes by streetcar from home, somehow it felt a thousand miles away. Every day we waited for our families to visit, to hear good news, to see the loving faces, but it was all in vain.

By the end of the week we were sorted out and shipped to different camps. Twelve of us young and healthy species were send to a camp called Spytkovice, a very small village in Poland. In the midst of empty fields were standing a few wooden barracks, it must have been once a Polish army camp.

On our arrival, which was late in the afternoon, we were ushered into the empty dark barrack, little gas lamps were dimly lit, and all you could see was piles and piles of straw,

All of us quickly got busy filling the straw into large potato sacks, this will be our mattresses. The place was so depressing , we were

shivering from inner cold and fear. We were some place in the end of the world, this was surley a ghost town , like in the story books I used to read. Exhausted and hungry , we found refuge on the hard straw mattress, to restore our strength and sanity. Next morning we will be assigned to our new duties.

We had no blankets, and no food, but my body was so exhausted that I slept like a log. After a breakfast of black sticky bread and chicory warm coffee, we were send to our destination. I was given work in the kitchen, with three more girls, also from Bendzin, one of them Guta Chrzanowska became my closest friend.

Others worked in the laundry, sewing room, Wermacht room, and kitchen.

By noon, there was a big turmoil on the camp grounds, a transport of men was arriving from Holland. All of us girls, were directed to " Special Commando".

Large tables were set up in the yard, with two S S. men by every corner of the table, they were getting ready to receive the newcomers, the new victims. The men marched in straight from the train station, they were ordered to line up for roll call. This must have been the handsomest 300 men I saw. They were dressed in what must have been their best "Shabbos" clothing. Each one of them carried a large suitcase, mostly leather.

One family in particular made a big impression on me. They were lined up in one row, and looked very much alike. They were straight and tall , there was something very special about them. Sure enough as I found out later, they were the Pollack family. Father and five sons, all of them were athletes, Track champions from Amsterdam.

Every suitcase was confiscated, and all jewelry, watches, cufflinks, rings, were dropped into separate baskets which lined the tables. They also lost their belts, some had real fancy buckles, and wallets.

Next step was the shower barrack. Undressed to the bare skin, they

were searched by a number of S.S. men, golden teeth removed by a butcher dentist, their screams were filling the air.

After a cold shower, and delousing (those people had no lice) they were given a gray striped uniform to cover their frozen humiliated bodies.

After the ceremony was over, they were ordered to their prospective barracks. where triple bunk beds, with no mattresses, were set up row after row after row.

This was a very sad picture, watching those gorgeous boys stripped of their clothes, possessions, dignity, their identity, not speaking, torn away from their loved ones. My heart was going out to them.

We Polish Jews, were much stronger, mentally, and physically, than the Western Jew. We were used to insults, degrading, calling us "Dirty Jews". Coming home from school , rocks were thrown at you, "Zydzie ic do Palestyny" " Jew go to Palestine". Life in Poland was much harder and more primitive, than in Holland. Next to God, they loved their queen. every morning they used to get of their bunks, and salute and sing the National Anthem , for their beloved queen.

Those poor boys could not struggle, and gave up on life very quickly. They stopped singing their Anthem. Refused to get up in the morning , and go to work. And those who went to the 'Baustelle' (working site) digging ditches, and chiseling rocks, were beaten and kicked by the young guards. They were mostly Volksdeutsche, Poles who lived in Silesia, and during the war became Germans. They were the cruelest and meanest. Most of them were let out of jails. The rifle and Wehrmacht uniform made them feel strong and superior.

At this time I worked in the kitchen, I had the a very hard time. The kitchen chef was a tyrant, and a big woman hater. He was mean to me. He made me wash the two soup kettles, which served 300 people, the

kettles were dried out, from all-day of simmering. I used to climb up on a stool and scrub them with my raw fingers, till blood came. He would not let me use a scrubbing pad, or brush. More than once I almost fell in the kettle. They were so deep to reach, and scrub the bottom. I had to raise my feet, this sadist would move the stool from under me, leaving my feet dangling in the air. My head and torso were in the kettle. How I did not hit the bottom, I still don't know.

One time , on a freezing winter day, I was wearing wooden open sandals, I removed the rags, which I was wrapping around my bare feet (the kitchen was warm) I saved them for the outside. Suddenly for no reason at all, the barbarian was holding in his hand a pail with boiling water, he looked , came close to me, and dumped the pail with its contents on me, it landed on my left foot. I guess I was still lucky. My pain was excruciating, I became hysterical. My toes were burning like fire, After a while the toes froze, as I said the rags did not do such a good job. My toes became a problem, they never healed. After this incident, things started to change.

We had in the Camp a yonge Wehrmacht guard, by the name of Jochen Kukla (of course Volksdeutch). Jochen, when on duty, was walking , and guarding the premises in his fancy uniform, and a rifle on his arm. Whenever he saw me, he talked and smiled at me, he actually was trying to flirt with me. I looked the other way, and pretended to be deaf and mute. I found out from a prisoner from Holland, by the name of Heinz Engelhart, that this Jochen Kukla was a big sadist, who burned Heinz on the " baustelle", he kicked him, shoved him, and beat him without mercy. He did the same to all the other prisoners who were under his guard.

Jochan was 20 years old, but he had tremendous urge for power, which was excited by cruelty and anger.

On this particular day, when I ran from the kitchen, sobbing from pain and humiliation, Jochen was on duty, making his rounds. He stopped me and asked what happened, between tears, I stammered out a few words, and pointed to my burning toes.

How strange it was hearing from him words of anger, directed to the kitchen chef, he kept repeating ,"How could he?" "How could he"? He started to comfort me, don't worry Hanka, I will do something about it. (how he new my name was a puzzle).

A few days later, one of the German officers came to the kitchen , he went over to the kitchen chef, talked to him , and pointed towards me.

I was standing by a large sink , washing potatoes for the soup , I saw that they were watching me. Cold sweat was covering my forehead, I was petrified. I was limping from the injury of my toes, and fungus was developing . I was washing my toes with urine , and making compresses from scraped potatoes.

There were rumors in the camp, of a "selection", some of the girls would be sent away.

After a few minutes , which seemed like eternity, The officer came over to me, and ordered me to come with him. I almost froze from fright.

What a wonderful surprise was waiting for me. He took me to the German barrack, where all the soldiers lived. I walked in to a huge oblong room, the room was so light, so much sunshine, windows and windows everywhere. Bunk beds from wall to wall, with a little space between them, just enough to fit in a wardrobe closet. The beds were made up identical. with blankets , and pillows, and of course decent mattresses. How I envied them. In the middle of the room, on a white clean wooden floor was a large iron stove. The room was warm and cozy. What wonderful aromas embraced me; cologne, soap, cigarette, hot chocolate, and the crackling wood in the stove. It was just much too much

for me to take in.

A half a dozen men, their uniform jackets, hanging over the chairs, were playing cards. The radio blasting away with Sara Leander's latest and famous shlager (Nur nicht aus Liebe Weinen) (Don't cry from love). Suddenly all eyes turned to me, they gave me a big hello, they were joking and making cracks, all kinds of remarks. I understood German, so what I heard, made me blush. They must have seen how embarrassed I was standing there, glued to the floor.

One of the officers, as it turned out he was one of the main guys, came over to me, gave me a approving look, and said "You will be working here, Hanna" They already knew my name. "You will keep our room clean, make the beds, clean our shoes, scrub the floor, and many other tasks, as they occur".

My head was spinning, will I be able to handle it? will I be capable to fill those requirements? After all, I never did such heavy cleaning before. Without much fuss, he pointed to a small hallway, on the side of the room filled with brooms, brushes, pail, rags. "Hanna get busy and scrub the floor".

I looked around the huge room and said, "Jawohl"! I was shaking inside, but pretended to be calm. I filled a pail with water, mixed in cleaning powder, took a bristle brush , which was three times the size of my hand, and pretended to be an expert.

After sweeping, the floor, which also took forever, I started scrubbing the dirty and muddy wooden floor. The truth is I did it all wrong, while I was bending , to reach the floor, my blood was rushing to my face, I was also very conscious of my raised skirt. The officers were laughing and having a field day, the more they were laughing and joking, the more purple I got. I was in a very uncomfortable position, just praying for a small miracle to happen. Luck was with me as it happened. One of the officers came over to me, and said, " Hanna, geh auf deine

kniee" (Go on your knees, and it will be much easier.)

I will never forget this, how he saved me , with this little tip. How silly and stupid of me, not to think of this simple technique, (but I had never washed a floor before.) From than on I became a number one floor scrubber, and nobody could peak under my skirt.
Most of the officers, were nice to me. I spoke fluent German, and they kept saying, (Hanna du bist doch kein Jude)."Hanna you are not a Jew", you are tall , pretty, you have a straight nose, you don't have bent legs, you are everything Jews are not. You are probably a mishling (mixture) and you don't know.

Working in the German barrack, changed a lot for me and other prisoners. I had a chance to talk a lot to young Jochen Kukla, and tried to make him understand that the boys he was beating and abusing, could very well be my father, or brother, matter of fact I told him that Heinz Engelhart was my cousin, that their family emigrated to Holland. He believed me. The changes from than on were astonishing .
Jochen started to bring bread and food to the work place, and above all, stopped beating the prisoners.

One evening, Heinz was waiting for me by the girls barrack, with a big smile, and a sparkle in his sad eyes, He kept repeating, and repeating , "I will survive, I will survive". He told me that Jochen gave him bread and sausage, Jochan walked away, so Heinz could eat, and rest, without being watched. Well what should I say ? I was overwhelmed. "Thank you, Almighty, for this miracle".

The overall situation in camp was deteriorating from day to day. The Haeflinge (prisoners), refused to wash, they did not eat, they simple did not leave the bunks. Every day more were send to thes sick room. The smells of those barracks, were beyond description. This was the smell of death.

Almost every evening some of the guards I worked for, brought me leftovers from the kitchen; big pots with soup, Oatmeal or some kind of wholesome cooked food. They used to say,"Hanna this is good for you,

it will make you strong". Guta and I were smuggling the food in cleaning pails, covered over with rags, carrying a large broom, and scrub brush, pretending we were going to clean the sick bay. Our aim was to feed the poor sick prisoners. Bring a smile to their sad faces, maybe we can help make them well.

Unfortunately they were beyond help, their bodies were skin and bone, two deep holes marked their eyes, one of them was the Pollack brother, I could barely recognize him. He was looking at me with an empty expression, no life, no hope, no will to live, they were begging for the end to come. I sat on the edge of the bunk, and started spoon feeding him, but he could not keep the soup down. Two days later he was dead. The last of the Pollack family.

One Sunday morning I was called to the Wachestube (Guard station), my mind was already racing, maybe they found out of our sick bay excursions, I may contaminate them with all those germs, they will surely throw me out, and punish me for what I did. Harrowing scenes were in front of my eyes, I imagined the worse. When I opened the door of the barrack, Jochen was standing by the entrance, waiting for me. On his face a broad smile, he took my hand, and lead me towards the end of the room and said, "You are going to meet my parents". I was completely taken by surprise.

The room was empty of soldiers, this was their day off, except for a couple on duty guarding the camp. Jochen pointed to a far corner near the window, and there they stood waiting for me. I did not know what to expect, am I seeing things? Who is crazy here? Me or them?. In front of me was Jochen's father, tall blond, tremendous resemblance to his son . His blue eyes were warm and expressive. Next to him was Jochen's mother, a real housfrau, soft and plump., a real motherly figure. Before I new what was happening, she reached out to me and took me in her

arms, hugged and kissed me, kept repeating "Jochen's Maedchen Jochen's Maedchen". Jochen's girl. I was overtaken with deep emotions, tears filling my eyes, not knowing what to say, what to do. I guess I'm crazy, or maybe I'm hallucinating?

When we all calmed down, she took my hand and looked straight into my eyes, Jochen was standing next to me, his father was watching the window, (he kept guard). My sweet Hanna, look at me and listen well (She spoke in German). Jochen told us a lot about you, he is in love with you and he begged us to help you escape, you don't have to worry about a thing, Jochen is our only son, we will do anything in the world to see him happy. We will come next Sunday, will bring you a uniform, with shoes to match, and a hat, no one will ever recognize you. Jochen will be on guard, we will have no problem getting you out of here. You will be under our care, you two will get married. I can see the beautiful children you will have together, you are made for each other, you will be our loving daughter, which we never had, and so on, and on, Jochen's mother did not stop talking.

Well all this was much to much for me to absorb. In my loneliest hours I could never come up with such thoughts, this was wild. My daydreams and fantasies never included Jochen Kukla, he was just a Nazi who liked me, and helped me with food, a smile, a good word. But, I could never forget how mean and cruel he used to be, it would not take much for Jochen to become his old self. I never imagined he was so serious about me.

They also let me in on a secret, that our camp was to be dissolved shortly, my life together with the other prisoners would be in danger.

I could not think straight, and I did not care, I shocked them with my outburst, "Ich bin eine Jidin!", I'm Jewish! I can't marry Jochen, this is against our religion, against my upbringing, this will never work, I got hysterical , started crying and ran out of the barrack.

It was very strange, suddenly I felt free, with them in the barrack I was trapped, my whole being belonged to them. There was no dreams, no hope left for me. Their demands on my life , were like putting chains on

me, and suffocating me. As noble and as generous they were to me , I felt like I was falling into a deep well and fighting to survive, and in the end drowning.

Lazy, December 1942 CAMP # 2

A new chapter, a new camp called Lazy.

Lazy, a small village near Zawiercie. Before I write about the camp, I want to describe our voyage from Spytkowice.

It started on a very cold and damp December morning , when getting up is already a chore, our bodies tired and worn out, we were always cold, the barrack was not heated. Actually there was a small iron stove in the middle of the room, but the was never enough wood to heat it. After our usual breakfast (of bread and chicory coffee) We went about our daily routine. Just a short while later, we were interrupted by a long whining siren. First we thought the camp is on fire, or who knows what.? Maybe somebody ran away, it had happened before.

The loud speakers were ordering us to assemble in the middle of the yard. The was no smoke, the barracks were still standing in place. Prisoners were running from all the corners. Amazing how quickly we were all lined up in rows of five. During the Appeal the loud voice of the Lagerfurer came through the loudspeaker, ordering us to pack our belongings, and return to the line. Fast, Fast. You will be leaving to a new destination.

We were marching towards the train station. This was a very sad picture. Those people dressed in rags, looking half dead are singing and smiling. People were pointing fingers at us, "Das sind doch Juden" These are Jews" They are criminals, there are swine, and they spit at us and threw stones at us.

We were only a dozen of girls, and about fifty men. By then it

started snowing , our feet were frozen, and bellies empty, all we could think was hot soup. Who cares if we live or die, our insides are squeaking from hunger all we want is to still this pain.

After a very long two hour walk, which seemed forever, we finally reached the train station. To our amazement, this was a real train, the same one I used to take to visit my grandparents in Katowice. We boarded the train , we were only a few girls to a compartment, we had wonderful seats , and I was seated by the window. I always loved to look out from the train window, trying to imagine how the people lived, what did they do, who are they? The rooms were always poorly lit, you could only see silhouettes, never the less , I was fascinated by it.

Well this time was different, I looked out from the window, not knowing or recognizing any familiar scene . I didn't know the name of the villages or what directions we were heading, the Germans changed all the names of the little towns.

Suddenly the train came to a stop. A very familiar building was spreading before my eyes , it can't be, this is magic, or am I seeing things? We are in Bendzin ! the building is Kosciuszki 2, we had been living there since1936, until this bloody war broke out.

My nose and face were plastered to the window glass, it was so quiet on the street. This was a five-story brown house, with two five story side buildings which were split by a large court in the middle of the court yard was a block long. The were so few people on the street, it was so deserted, it looked like everybody was dead. Where are the children ? They always used to play in front of the house, skipping, playing ball, running around, where is everybody? What happened to those people? What happened to those children? Where is the little candy store? What happened to the grocery? Hey you! How can you forget, or just want to forget, remember, they cleaned up this neighborhood. They called it

"Judenrein" They shoved them in to the ghetto, took away all their belongings. I was there, why do I wonder of the silence? This happened three years ago, since we had to leave our comfortable apartment.

My parents bought new furniture, just before the war, beautiful bedroom set, shiny brown walnut, I marveled at the shape of the head and foot board, the foot board was very low. They called it "very, very modern" Triple Armoire, and a large triple mirror, I spend a lot of time in front of it. Also a beautiful dinning room set, upholstered brown leather chairs, with a fancy credenza.

One day, yet before Judenrein, an S. S. man came in to our apartment , he fell in love with our furniture and said, " This I want". Well, he got it. Not only did he take what he wanted , but he also evicted us from our home. Here went our beautiful furniture, our lovely home, and we were ordered to move to a cold one-room warehouse, actually it was more like a garage

Well I wanted to forget what happened in those last three years. I hoped to see my family, a family face, someone I could recognize, all in vain. Here and there I saw a peasant, a woman wrapped in a big babushka, a soldier a man carrying , what looked like a lunch box, I guess, on his way to work.

By now I was already crying hysterically, the tears felt so bitter, this is reality, they are all gone. My tears were more bitter by the second. Something terrible happened to me. My body was shivering out of control, I was coughing and spitting bitter saliva, like something inside me was going haywire. With all that, I was so lucky, no S. S. man was in my compartment. My three friends tried to comfort me, they were totally helpless.

After the longest 30 minutes, the train took of, leaving me drained and numb. By the evening we arrived in Lazy.

Those winter nights creep up on you so suddenly. Large military trucks were waiting for us, and we were pressed in like sardines,(one way of keeping warm.) We were transported to the camp, which seemed to be in nowhere land. Wooden barracks, standing on naked and deserted fields.

We girls were assigned to Barrack 6. The place was occupied by a dozen of girls, who came to Lazy a month before, they were from our neighborly city Sosnowice. The girls welcomed us very warmly, showering at us million questions at once. Where are you coming from? Did you see my sister? My brother? My parents?

One of the girls by the name of Hala, came over to me with a big grin on her face. "Are the Szykmans from Slawkow your relatives?" "Yes , they are my grandparents." Hala started hugging ,and kissing me, you are Szprincale's granddaughter! I loved Szprincale, our whole family is indebted to her, She was a Tzadic, a righteous woman. She helped my family, and looked after my ailing mother. After my mother died, Szprincale was our tower of strength . She went on and on. She also kept telling everybody what "ychus" I came from.

After we all calmed down , We were shown to our bunks. As soon as we got settled, the light went out. We prayed in silence and escaped to our own worlds.

It must have been hours, and I was still awake, I could not fall asleep. I was cold , my stomach was aching , and suddenly I started shivering , my teeth rattling , they were making their own music , I had only one gray thin blanket, I tried to be very quiet, not to disturb others.

By some strange wonder, Hala must have heard me. She was also restless, and could not sleep. She tiptoed over to my bunk, when she touched my forehead, She screamed out " You are burning up, You have high fever!"

Hala was my "Angel of Mercy "Now she has a chance to help Szprincales granddaughter. Hala took me to her bed , it was heaven, unbelievable. She had a down filled duvet, with soft down filled pillows. She gave me something to drink, it must have been a magic potion, it worked wonders, I fell asleep like a baby.

You will probably wonder how come Hala had all those luxuries. Hala worked in the kitchen, and she had many privileges, she was a old-timer, she probably brought her bedding from home, I really never found out from where she had all that stuff.

My fever lasted a few days, I was slept two days straight, hallucinating and screaming. I was out to the world. When I woke up I had a hard time remembering where I was and what happened to me.

The morning of my awakening I saw a uniform clad man by the foot of my bed, looking at me intensely, the girls from the barrack (25 of them) where standing at attention.

The short man in the gray uniform, was asking me my name, and where I was born. He was the "Sturband Fuhrer". As I found out later, he was very mean and cruel. His specialty was to hose the male prisoners with ice cold showers until they dropped dead. I don't know, till today, why I found favor and compassion in his heart?. I didn't know that I had jaundice. This horror of a man, let me stay in bed for the next 2 months. Every day, standing by the foot of my bed, asking me how I felt. He talked very little, but his blue ice cold eyes, were gazing at me. I was very frightened , every day I thought, this will be my last day.

Time went by, Hala kept feeding me with good stuff, oatmeal, farina, mashed potatoes, all kinds of food she could scrap up in the kitchen. I was a very lucky girl.

Ten weeks passed, and I was progressing steadily, I was getting stronger, and my yellow skin was turning to its normal color.

Next I was assigned to very easy work . I spend my days in the sewing room mending laundry, sewing buttons , and such like.
One day, the chef of the German kitchen, came in to have strings sewn to his apron, he started a conversation with me. He must have been impressed , because soon after I was transferred to the German kitchen to work as his helper. He was a wonderful man , a real father image. He was good to me , always turned his cheek sideways, so I could gather (in plain language steal) some provisions from the stock room.

My health and strength returned quickly. Every evening , me and my friend Guta used to visit the barracks and sick room , sharing our goodies.

The boys were doing very badly. The camp had about 300 hundred prisoners, also from Holland, France and Belgium. The winter was very cold, little food, very hard work, digging ditches, a lot of beating and abusing. The cold showers were a daily routine, they were dying from it in large numbers.

One morning the camp leader came in to our barrack with a list, and called out names, 12 girls will be deported to a different camp. This was a very sad and moving situation, by the evening everybody was crying . We had to separate from our friends, we were like a large family.

To My dismay Hala was also deported. Me and Guta plus eight others stayed on.

What I found out next day, from the kitchen chef, put goose pimples through my body. He said to me " Hanna you are very, very, lucky," your life was on a scale and an angel tipped it your way". "You are here by a sheer miracle."

I'm very sad to say, that those beautiful , and lovely girls, in the break of their womanhood, did not survive. Nobody saw or heard from them, they went straight to Auschwitz.

Two weeks latter the camp was dissolved. After three months of existence only a handful of boys were left.

On a damp and windy March day, we were wanderers once again.

Where now?

Camp # Three , Trzyniec.

Everything around you looks gloomy, the sky above matches your mood, sadness and helplessness, overtakes your whole being . It looks like the heavens are crying and feeling your pain . Like abandoned little sheep we gathered our few belongings , and once again we were packed in to a large closed truck, not knowing where to ? Where the wheels will take us? Where will we be tonight? Will we live tomorrow? Or are we doomed to the ovens?

The morbid mood and sadness progressed with the day. We were pressed together like herrings, the road was very bumpy , every one of us was vomiting and crying . We just could not hold back. We felt so sorry for ourselves, enough is enough, sometimes you just want it all to be over, no more hardship , no more pain. The ride took five hours, it seemed like a eternity. Finally it came to a end, the truck stopped suddenly, when we least expected it . Somebody unlocked the doors, and we heard yelling , Raus! Raus! Alle Raus! (Out ,everybody out).

We found ourselves in the middle of empty fields, little wooden barracks scattered here and there, a very familiar scene, those small camps , just all looked alike.

Suddenly there was hope again , the sun pushed through the clouds, greeting us and warming with its golden rays, whispering to us, this will be your new home for now, sweet children of mine, don't give up hope, I shall protect you and keep you safe. After a couple of hours we were settled . We were send to our barracks, once again, pointed to our bunks.

Me and Guta were always together. We both were assigned to work in the laundry. So now I'm a laundress, a new career. This was a terrible job. We had to scrub laundry for 300 prisoners. Every morning I came to

the laundry barrack, and mountains and mountains of very soiled laundry piled up, with lice crawling on them. The first day I just could not do it. I was throwing up, and feeling sick to my stomach, an army of lice.

Well they won. First we had to soak all of it, in a large cement tub, and than scrub on a scrubbing board, with some kind of soft mushy soap. Since I had only one pair of wooden shoes, I was working barefoot on that cold wet asphalt floor. A pair of shoes was a treasure.

After a day of work, my hands were bleeding, the fingers and palm of my hands were raw and burning like fire.

As it turned out, the kitchen chef from Lazy, was also transferred to Trzyniec, he gave me the honor, to take care of his laundry. I washed it separately, bleached, starched, and ironed to perfection. He was very pleased with my performance. I used to deliver the clean laundry to the German kitchen and pick up the dirty one. Like I said before, he was a good man, he always left the kitchen when I came, and also left the storage room open. I infringed on this hospitality, and helped myself to some provisions. I carried them out with the soiled laundry bag. God, how my heart was beating. I was so afraid of being caught, I was never sure, at any giving moment, he could walk in and catch me stealing.

Carrying out this little farina, rice, or oatmeal , sometimes sugar, was also very dangerous . The soldier standing on duty, could call me over and check me out. I guess he never suspected.

I thanked Almighty after every successful mission. A few weeks later a large transport with new prisoners arrived. Thiswas very large camp, and new truckloads kept coming all the time. Only male prisoners . The camp filled up very quickly

One day between the new victims , I spotted two boys, 18 year of age. They looked so familiar . They were so skinny and shabby looking . Those scared and melancholic eyes were haunting me . After I approached them, and started talking to them, it came to me like a flash from the past, they were my beloved sister Sala's friends, from the summer resort Rajcza, where we spent the summer of 1939. Just before

the outbreak of the war.

Ziggy Knaul was the more fragile one, he lived in Rajcza. Heinz Chamback, son of a professor, lived in Bielsko. He inherited his fathers academic "Intelligencia look". Heinz lost his glasses and had problems seeing. Those boys were very close to my heart, they became my protégés, and I did everything I could to help them. It was like having Sala next to me.

I started reliving the pest, remembering those beautiful times in Rajcza. One day, my father saw Sala and Heinz kissing on a bench in the park. Sala was 15 years old, this was her first love, they were crazy about each other. My father gave Sala two smacks across her face, and forbad her to see Heinz again. Kissing was immoral, a nice girl does not kiss. I felt so sorry for Sala.

Back to the boys.

No matter how much food I was stealing , Heinz never had enough, he was always hungry. Ziggy had ulcers, he was always in pain. The work they did was also very hard. They worked on construction.
With much effort I got Ziggy working in the main kitchen. The Jewish kitchen chef listened to my pleading, and had him transferred .

Ziggy had enough food, and was protected from the could, and abuse from the guards.

Ziggy survived the war, and lived here in Toronto. We were very good friends, till his death, after a losing battle with cancer. He left a lovely daughter Felicia, a handsome son Jonathan, and sweet gentle wife Marie.

Life in Trzyniec, was going on. We were working hard, and transports kept coming , and going. There were always different rumors, we didn't know what to expect next.

The latest rumor was, that the ghetto in Bendzin, was dissolved. Bendzin became " Judenrein". We were worrying terribly, and all those

different rumors were killing us..

The same evening , the rumors came true. A big transport of men , hundreds of them, came marching in through the huge iron gates. They came by train , and walked all the way from the station. The guards directed them to some empty barracks. The were screams everywhere . Family names were being called out, we were all shouting, from where are you? From what city? Did you see my family?

This transport was from the ghetto in Bendzin and Sosnowice . Our own home town, our own backyard.

As soon as they were located to their barracks, I started running, with the rest of the girls, (we were all from those parts of Poland), to search for our relatives.

I was praying , and hoping to find my beloved father, or brother, maybe I will be lucky.

The barracks were very poorly lit, one little bulb was dimly lit, it was impossible to see their faces. Everybody wanted to be heard and get some answers. I was one of the them, yelling in the loudest voice. "Is here someone by the name of David Szykman? or Idek Szykman? Please are you here? I beg you answer me? I heard a voice shouting, yes, yes, they are here, they were with us on the same train, they are here, they are here!

Where are you? Daddy,? Idek, where are you? Please help me someone to find them. I'm Hanka, your daughter, your sister. Where are you? There was no answer, from my beloved family.

I ran to the next barrack, crying bitterly. Maybe they are here? I kept running back and forth, from one barrack to the other barrack , back and forth, back and forth, and shouting my name, but in vain.

I could not find my beloved father and brother.

I did meet one of our neighbors, and he told me what really

happened. My father and Idek were in one of those two trains, together with our neighbor. The people were packed like sardines, it was very hot , and no air to breathe, so my father and Idek walked through to the next car. In the middle of the journey the trains were separated, one train came to our camp, and the other went straight to hell, to Auschwitz.

I didn't want to go back to my barrack, this severe blow, left me without will to go on. I had them so close to me. I did not stop fantasizing and daydreaming. In my imagination I saw them working in the kitchen, all of us together. What a beautiful fantasy, what a tragic twist of fate.

Very depressing days and nights followed . I just couldn't accept it.

As everything else in life, nothing stays still for long , Trzyniec also came to pass. Once again, without notice, we were ordered to pack up , and move on. By noon we were again loading the huge trucks. On the road again, where now? The whole camp was liquidated after three months.

Annaberg was our new destination. June 1943. Camp # 4

Annaberg was situated in a most beautiful and picturesque place in Germany. Mountains and greenery everywhere. This camp was huge, probably a few thousand people, only men. From here you were sent to different camps. You were awaiting selection, and than came departure.

We were in Annaberg for two weeks, we didn't work, we marched in circles, in the huge yard, all day long. We were watched by the German guards, so we didn't talk to other prisoners, and didn't get out of line.

I happened to have it quite good in Annaberg. The Judeneltest brother Moniek, took a liking to me. He was always coming and walking with me in line. Moniek was dressed to kill, beautiful riding pants, shiny

black boots, a leather wind breaker, and carrying in his hand a thin stick, tapping on his boots. (We called it a "Szvitzer" a showoff).

The fact is, that I was a very lucky girl indeed. All he wanted was to talk to me. He was really a very nice boy, after all, his brother had some power in this camp, so Moniek was entitled to be a show off. He was only 19 years old.

Food wise we did o.k. I did especially well with Moniek's help. We also had warm water to shower, this was a luxury beyond words. He said to me, " You are a very lucky girl, that I chose you" The fact was, I was a lucky, all he wanted was to talk to me , and try to impress me. He was basically a nice guy.

Annaberg lasted only two weeks. The order came for us to move on. This time it was a very long raid by train. We went to Gross-Masslovitz, near Breslau in Germany.

Gross- Masslovitz end of June 1943, Camp # 5

Well Gross-Maslowitz , is a story for itself. A lot of things happen here. We arrived to the camp, still in broad daylight .The camp was located, not to far from the train station . The gates opened, with German guards, on both sides, We were not more than ten girls, and a few hundred men.

Ziggy and Heinz and their friend Herman Weisltzer, who was from Rajcza, were among us. Herman was an exceptionally nice person, and also very handsome, he took a fancy to my friend Guta. Matter of fact, Herman and Guta got married when the war ended. Gross-Maslovitz looked completely different from all the other camps. Huge empty asphalt yard, with one large four-story building. This must have been a factory, of some kind, or maybe a prison. There was also a small barrack which looked like an oversized garage with eight girls were already

occupying this place. There were rows with double bunks, and of course the straw mattresses. The straw was needling in to the flesh, and the room had a terribly stale smell.

The large brick building, was occupied by male prisoners. They were mostly from Poland, from our region.

Herman found his brother Poldek. What luck, Poldek was the kitchen chef. Well, Herman wont go hungry.

All of us on the new transport, had to stand on appeal, in rows of five, we were counted, and assigned to our quarters.
Something very extraordinary happened, while we were standing in the courtyard, the old campers were pushing to the windows, trying to get a glimpse at us. Like the song goes "Watching all the girls go by". Well one of those lookers was a boy by the name of, Lutek Goldstein. Lutek was standing by the window, with a neighbor of ours, Mr. Wekselman , his daughter Hacia, was a school mate, of mine, of course he recognized me. Lutek pointed to me, and said " This girl I would like to meet". Mr. Wekselman shouted with excitement, "This is Hanka Szykman" My neighbor! My daughters friend! Well, Lutek almost fainted.
Lutek and myself were sworn friends, when we were age 12. We lived in Dabrowa, Gurnicza, our parents were very friendly with the Goldsteins, and Rechnic family, Lutek's Grandparents.
Lutek and I were inseparable as children. We played together, went to the movies, used to go swimming to the " Rinna" where hot water came out from the mines. He also taught me, unsuccessfully, to ride a bike. Our parents , and everybody else called us a pair. A year later, we moved to Bendzin, and I was send to Katovitz , to stay with my grandparents, where I attended grade five. Luteks visits were more frequent.

At the age of 16, we meeting again, in those strange and far away from home surroundings.

As soon as we were located in our bunker, we were called to the kitchen , to get the daily bread and soup.

Lutek was already waiting outside our barrack. It was a wonderful reunion. He was so tall and handsome. Suddenly we were grown up, facing each other, just like from a fairy book. Every evening, Lutek came to the front door of our barrack and whistled his familiar sound. I was

waiting impatiently for his whistle. We used to stroll , back and forth across that asphalt court yard as did other prisoners. We were allowed to be outside and socialize till 8 o'clock. Regretfully we then had to retire, to our own quarters.

This camp was very strange, all the men and woman worked on construction. Each group had a master, and they had a little hut, if they had a good master, they cooked food on a little iron stove, and warmed their bodies when the weather was cold. All this depended on who was your master. Some of them looked sideways, they even brought some food, let you get some rest, of course they were a minority.THEIR job was cleaning up the roads, carrying stones, but we did different work, like clearing warehouses, climbing up ladders, and patching up roofs. Boy, was I afraid of heights. Sometimes I was standing on the roof, and shivering from fright, cold sweat was covering my forehead, and me standing there frozen from fear. I thought that I was strong and brave, I uncovered another part of me, I had fear of heights.

One day I worked near Luteks construction site, he invited me to his master's hut (during our lunch break).Was he ever lucky. His master was a "Mensch".

I will never forget it. It was already late fall , and the weather was bitter cold, and dampness went through your bones. I did not have warm clothes, my body was shivering, I was also very hungry, my bread ration was long gone. Well, when I walked into this hut, it felt like I was entering paradise. The room was small, with a happy crackling fire in the round iron stove. The pleasant warmth overtook me, a wonderful aroma was overpowering my senses, this can't be for real.

Lutek brought me out of my trance, "come in " He said, would you like some hot potato soup"? So this is the heavenly aroma. Yes, yes I replied thankfully. On top of the stove, was a large brown milk can, you know, those old fashioned ones that the milk man used to carry for milk

deliveries. So there, where the soup was simmering. I can tell you that I never ate a better soup, than Lutek's potato soup. Till today my heart is filled with thanks, and the taste will remain with me always.

One evening , Lutek smuggled in potatoes to the camp, unfortunately he was caught. The potatoes were taken away from him, and he was badly beaten. He was thrown in, to the solitary, in the rat infested basement.

Every week we had a selection, the prisoners were lining up in rows of five, the very notorious Sturmband fuhrer arrived (Short and stocky, with a big limp). His name was Hutshild. We all were dreading his arrival, who will be next to go?. Who will be next "Korben"? Who will be next sacrifice?

After one of those feared appels, Ziggy and Heinz were selected, among other prisoners to leave Gross Maslowitz. It was a very sad day. Heinz tried to joke " Dali nam dzisiaj w dupe". This was always his familiar saying when things went bad. (They kicked our ass today.) Ziggy was speechless, only his eyes were talking, reflecting pain and sorrow. Will we ever meet again?

Next day, life went on. The battle for survival knows no boundaries.

One evening, on our daily after supper stroll, Lutek introduced me to his best buddy, by the name of Lopek (short for Leopold). I must say I was very impressed. Lopek was six years older than us, he was born in Osviecim, which was later renamed Auschwitz.

I called him Leibek, he was a real gem. He was very good-looking, though medium height,well built, large hazel eyes, with long dark lashes, (every girl's dream). His hair was dark and curly, he wore glasses, they were very becoming on him, he looked like a young professor.

It was very exciting to walk in threesome. Leibek attended Hebrew gymnasium in Krakow. He was well educated, well mannered, and very,

very shy. We loved to listen to the stories, he was telling us. Lutek and I would eat up those stories, like the best food, and that what it was , food for our starved souls. I considered myself very lucky, to be in the company of two such great guys. I felt safe and protected, if only for two hours.

Leibek used to help me with extra food, he somehow came up with a warm jacket and a pair of slacks, also beautiful gray suede shoes. I felt like a princess. Leibek knew a tailor, and a shoe maker, for money, or food you could get things made.

My friend Guta, got the same outfit, everybody called us twins, or (chlopcy) which means, boys. We looked like two boys in those outfits .

Guta and Herman were going with each other. As you already know, Herman worked in the kitchen, he also got Leibek in to work there. Those two became very close friends.

One Sunday morning, we were cleaning and airing out our straw mattresses, also the few "shmates" we had.

I opened up my small cardboard box, and suddenly a family of rats jumped out, there were so many of them, my screams must have been heard in the whole camp. All the clothes I possessed were in shreds. Can you imagine, I was practically sleeping with the rats. The cardboard box was lodging on my bunk. I used it to support my back, or used to write on it . The girls took pity on me, and made a collection for me.

Sunday afternoon we were allowed to visit the men, in that huge monstrous building.

I remember this very large room, it looked like a maze, with double bunks everywhere. Very little space in between . On every bunk you could see a men, sitting or sleeping, talking to his neighbor, some were patching up their clothing, or just staring nowhere, with their blank and pitiful expressions.

Somewhere in the middle of the room, someone was playing an out of tune melody, on a broken violin, you could hear soft humming , full with longing and emotion in their voice. Some were even dancing, holding on and clinging to each other, gaining strength and will to live.

In the far end of the room, was the " sick room". May Almighty have mercy, those poor boys were lying on those straw beds, the room was very dimly lit, without care, dirty and hungry, a terrible odor was spreading everywhere, almost nobody came out of there. Every day some were selected and taken away.

In this huge room, where life and death lived side by side. One was singing and dreaming of tomorrow, and only a few feet away, Szmuleks' and Moshes' dreams and hopes came to a end. There will be no tomorrow for those, in this dark corner of the room.

I was overtaken with bitter emotions, everything was revolting inside me. I ran like somebody was chasing me, out of this forsaken building, this dreadful place. I don't want a part of it, I never went to visit again. One time was a hundred times too much.

One evening Lutek came with news from his mother. He had received a letter, through some outside connection. His mother was surviving as a Gentile nurse, in the outside world. She got papers as a Aryan, and worked in a hospital. She spoke a very good Polish, and her looks also didn't give her away. She wrote in the letter, how pleased she is to hear that I am also in Gros-Maslowitz. She will see to it that Lutek and I get false I. D's, so we will be able to escape together. She will be waiting for us with open arms. Lutek's mother was very found of me, she remembered well how close we were as children. Hanka will be my daughter, she wrote in the letter, I can't wait to have you with me.

Mrs Goldstein was a very lovely lady, I remember my visits to their home, they lived on Labenska, very close to my dear father's tannery,

where we also lived. Their home was always very lively, especially Grandfather Rechnic, he always used to tease me and joke with me. Lutek's mother played beautiful piano. I have wonderful memories from the one year, we lived in Dabrowa Gurnicza, in 1937.

Let me get back to Gros-Maslowitz. As it turned out, we never got our fake I.D. Very shortly after, news came around of a mass liquidation . The whole camp will be dissolved. Woman and man will be separated , and sent to concentration camps.

It did not take long for the rumor to come true.

The day was gray and cold, chills and fear were possessing our body and soul, the same question over and over again. Where now? How much can we endure? Will there ever be a end to it? We were here for six months, made friends andlearned how to survive . We were like a family, we were all so close with each other, this was a very sad good-bye. Everybody was crying and choking on those bitter tears.

We were saying farewell to the boys. The girls transport was first to leave. I kissed Lutek, and promised after the war (if we survive) to look for each other. When I kissed Lopek good-bye, he whispered to me " please kiss me again". This was the first time we kissed. "Moja pierwsza i ostatnia" he whispered, lyrics from a song, "My first and my last one ". Lechitra Ot my love. This romantic interlude, confused and bewildered me. I didn't realize that Lopek was in love with me.

March, March, came the voices of the guards, sing, sing, (Unter der Laterne steht Lili Marlene) March, March, Sing , Sing. And away we went.

Peterswaldau Dec. 1943. CAMP # 6

A very long train ride, all the way in the mountain. The train had

little windows, and all of us were pushing , to get a glimpse of the world. What we saw unfolding before our eyes, was really a lost paradise. Mountains and hills, covered with white powder snow, so clean , so pure, this surely can't be bad. After five hours, the train came to a stop. From afar , we could see a board hanging over a very small , which read " Peterswaldau di Eulengeburge". We never heard of it before, but I knew "Geburge" means Mountains.

We sure were in winter wonderland, We could also feel it. The air was crisp and clear. We marched to the camp through winding roads and hills, we also passed a little village. This must have been a skiing resort, because we were passed by a group of young men on skis. They talked to us in French, while we were keeping our marching trot, and singing. The snow was soft under our feet, most of us wore wooden shoes, and some of us were slipping and falling.

A million thoughts went through my mind. People are free, they live, they smile, they ski, what about us? Will we be free again? Will we be a part of those wonderful things life has to offer? While I was deep in my thoughts, a young Frenchmen kept skiing close to me, he looked at me with pitiful eyes, he mimicked my sad expression , and he said something , which I did not understand.

Just a turn away , we were ushered in to a huge electric fenced yard. What we saw before us , you could only see in a dream. A enormous huge castle was spreading in front of us, it looked like we were on the lost horizon. Everything was happening very quickly, it was getting dark. The siren went on with it its scary sound, we lined up for roll call.. We were counted by two S. S. women, dressed in gray uniforms; they were very loud and rough. They were wearing shiny boots and clapped on them with a thin long stick.

A Jewish woman, Bronia Weinsetein was also domineering the scene, and exersizing her powers. She was a very beautiful woman, maybe in her late twenties. Honey blond hair, smooth and shiny , mid length, it was very, very well groomed. Her eyes were burning and piercing like coals, she

carried on as if she owned this place, as if she was destined to live forever. Like she was made from different flesh and blood, she was the same dirty Jew, like the rest of us.

The room we were assigned to, was one huge hall . This must have once been a ballroom , or such like. The area was stripped of everything, except, pairs of triple bunk beds, with thinly filled straw mattresses . We got a brown itchy blanket, to keep us warm.

The room was very dimly lit, a small iron stove standing in the middle of the room. It really made no difference to me, because my bunk was far from the oven , and most of the time the were no coals.

Me and Guta were lucky to get the top two bunks, so we had the balcony view so to speak. We could also have a little more light and air, not to ignore the hustle and bustle of the top inmates. I had very few clothes. I still carried my torn little cardboard suitcase. I stored it under the mattress, this was my pillow.

Bread and lukewarm coffee, was our daily ration, we also got a soup in the evening after work. The bread was sticky like glue, the coffee, colored water.

After we got our soup , from the kitchen window, we went to get washed. Took no time to eat the soup , you had to be lucky to find a potato. Later in the evening we were lining up for our bread ration, which was given out by the Stuben elteste, with her helpers, in the middle of the room.

I had to hide my bread under the mattress or hold on to it tight , otherwise it was stolen.

The castle had five floors, and each floor had different lay outs. The camp was already occupied by victims like us, who came from different parts of Poland. All the regular size rooms were occupied. What was left was this massive big hall. Well, we arrived, and the hall was no longer empty. Matter of fact, this was the loudest and coldest place in the castle.

At nine o clock the lights went out, we were ordered to go to sleep.

You could hear quiet whispers around you , somebody was whistling a beautiful and sentimental melody. I closed my eyes, absorbing the sounds. I was fantasizing and dreaming up pictures which were comforting in seizing my mind and soul. On those escapades I was always with my beloved sister Sala, she was always included in my journey to life and freedom.

I guess, exhausted and drained, sleep overtook me to help repair my body and give me new strength for tomorrow.
Six in the morning the siren went on. what I would give for a little more sleep. We washed , cleaned our cubicle, had a chunk of bread , and lined up in the yard for appeal.

Two S. S. woman were the scare of the camp. One was bleached blond, the other had dark hair. The brunette looked very mean, she acted even meaner. They must have been in their early 30's. The line of five, had to be very straight, she led her dog run in the middle of the line. A viscious German shepherd was growling, and we were frozen with fear. What a spectacle they were performing, and Bronka swinging her thin stick, making whipping sounds. The blond S. S. woman seemed much calmer, and looked less scary.

After we were counted, and looked over, we were orderd to march. Links, rechts, links, rechts. Sing doch mensch , sing.

The walk was short, at the end of the village, we were facing again iron gates. Two S. S. men opened the gates, we were facing a gray old concrete building, with even narrow windows, they looked like holes in bare walls. This jail like looking building, was a ammunition factory, it consisted of three very large halls. Colony # 1, 2 ,3 and 4.

I was assigned to colony #4. We were about 100 girls in our colony. This hall was very huge . When you came in, you saw two rows of long tables, on each side of the room. Every table had five chairs, waiting for us to occupy them. I was shown how to operate, a small drilling machine. This machine had a tiny delicate drill, and I was drilling holes with small

screws. I had to be very careful, a little more pressure the drill broke. The girl sitting next to me, was putting in a little stick , and the next one gave a knock with a wooden hammer. This procedure was called " Band arbait " chain work. When the task by our table was accomplished, the master took the product to the next table. This went from hand to hand, and from table to table, till the product was finished. We were making timers for bombs, how scary.

Guta was sitting in the next row. Altough there were a hundred workers in our colony, it was so quiet you could not hear a whisper, no human voices, just the machines, bang, bang, bang. You could not talk , you could not look. There were hidden eyes looking and watching us.

To go to the washroom was a very big ordeal, especially when the dark S. S. woman was on duty. She was sitting at the end of the hall, and taking in the whole scene. We had to report to hear, and ask permission, and she would not let me go. I begged her, I told her, I have diarrhea, she would not listen. She got up from her chair, went over to me , and gave me two hard smacks in my face, and send me back to my working table. I refused to continue drilling, I hunched my body, my face resting on the surface of the table, my arms over my head, and I cried and cried.

On our floor was a Lady Master who was German and about 50 years old. She came over to me, and after listening to my complaint, took me over to the S.S. woman, whispered something to her, and she let me finally use the washroom .

I won this battle, but I was at war with this S. S. woman. She hated me, and did very mean thinks to me. She watched me with her piercing wild eyes, like a tigress, ready to attack its victim.

One day, something very unbelievable happen. Like I mentioned before , our colony had quite a few masters, some were recruited from France, they were free, living in the village, and working in the factory. Remember the young skiing Frenchmen we saw on our arrival? The one who was making goo, goo eyes at me. The one who was skiing right next to me? Well he was one of my masters.

Jean Pierre was his name. Jean came over to my table every few minutes, inspecting my work, and at the same time, giving me those

dreamy looks. He spoke very little German, he tried not to make it obvious . The S. S. woman was sitting and watching him.

Every morning , I found four pastries hidden in a drawer of my table. This was a treat beyond words. I had three partners to share them with; Guta, Helen, and myself.

With the cakes, stashed in a paper bag, came always a love letter. Helen spoke French, she was older than me, a major in languages. She used to read me those romantic letters, translate them and help me with the correspondence. (Oh yes, she deserved a pastry).

After a couple of weeks, the brunette S. S. woman, we called her " die shwarze hexe", the black witch. She kept watching us, those piercing eyes , like a rat, started detecting something. Her eyes always followed us, she was always flirting with Jean, but he was very cold and indifferent.

One day she saw why. Jean was leaning over by my table, pointing at the machine, and whispering " Je t'aime cherie" . Only I could hear it, but she started watching us constantly. She became suspicious, you did not have to be a genius to figure this out. Everybody in the plant, knew Jean's infatuation with me.

This was the end of my Danish's. Sometimes I used to go to colony three, the factories' nurse was stationed there. I pretended to be sick, and requested to see the nurse to get a aspirin.

Jean Pierre always had a little letter ready, he would throw it on the floor, and I would circle around his area, where he was working, and when the time was ripe, I dropped my hanky, and picked it up with the letter. My heart was jumping , and I was scared.

I was never caught, if I would, who knows what wood happen.

Many times, Jean with his friends were waiting outside, watching us, marching back from work, on our way to the camp. How I envied

their freedom.

One Sunday morning, a bunch of Jewish male prisoners, from Reichenbach, came to our camp, to do some plumbing repairs. Reichenbach was only few miles away. One of the boys, I recognized right away. His name was Srulek Zukerman. Their family lived in Bendzin, in the same court yard were we lived. He was thrilled to see me, so was I.

Srulek was my age, we used to play ball together. He was a very good looking boy, and the girls liked him a lot. He came with the repair crew, they were all protégés, not mechanics. I found this out later. All those boys came to visit their relatives.

Bronka saw me talking to Srulek, she became very angry and aggressive. Snatched Srulek by his arm , and took him to her quarters. But there were more surprises for me. One of the boys, had a letter for me from Lopek. While he was pretending to repair the woman's toilet, he handed a letter to a girl, coming out of one of the toilets. My name was scribbled on it. This was a very daring and risky act. Had this come to the wrong hands, I would be severely punished. This girl happened to know me , so it came to me safe, she also risked her skin.

This letter was wonderful news, Lopek was only three miles away. So incredible, so close, and still, so far away. I kept reading those pages, over and over again. Six pages of poetry and love. A very popular song of those times "Moja pierwsza i ostatnia, moja jedna i jedyna" "You are my first one, and you are my last one". Very touching and sentimental lyrics.

My heart and mind were racing, a wonderful feeling of love was waking up in me, suddeny there was a purpose to live, a need to go on.

Our letters, went back, and forth, through different channels. We started discovering, and getting to know each other. Our likes, our dreams, our feelings, we poured our guts out, to find comfort and reason to go on. And so our bonds grew, stronger and stronger.

Lutek was send to Marksted, it was impossible to communicate with each other. He was three hours away, from our camp. There was

completely no contact.

Lopek got a position in the kitchen, Herman's brother Poldek, was the kitchen Chef there, Herman also worked in the kitchen. This was the best place to be. This meant survival. This meant not having to go to sleep with a empty growling belly.

Lopek made connection with a boy, whose sister was in our camp, also working in the kitchen. Her name was Esther. Every night at a certain time I went down to the kitchen to receive a extra heavy plate of soup. Lopek did the same for her brother.

Guta also got the same from Herman, he had made the same connection.

Like I mentioned before, there were always boys coming to our camp, with the pretext, of doing repairs. Guta and I used to get parcels of meat and fat. How did they smuggled this in? I don't know. Apparently, the boys dropped the parcels in the kitchen. Lusia, one of the kitchen girls, among rags and dirty aprons, dropped off the parcels in the laundry room, where we went to collect them. Our names were marked on the package.

Lopek also provided extra soup for my cousin Frajdale. Her bunk was across from mine, on the bottom level. Frajdale was my father's first cousin. She was a very exceptional person, I called her a saint. Frajdale would share the soup with her bunk inmates, the result was, she had no benefit from it. Frajdale was in her late twenties. She worked in" Colony Three", her work was very hard. She operated a "Spinerei" a webbing machine standing on her feet all day, on the wet concrete floor. There was one machine like this, in the whole camp, and poor Frajdale was assigned to it. We were very fond of each other. She knew me as a child, and she loved my family. It was good to have somebody so close. I could cry on her shoulder, and she patiently listened to my problems, bringing me comfort.

Jean Pierre was not giving up. He was building, and hoping for a future together. One day I decided to write him the truth. I told him about Lopek, I also wrote where he was, and that if we survived, Lopek

would come and get me. For this day, we lived and prayed.

Peterswaldau was a very lonely place. I was very shy, and kept all my feelings and emotions deep inside me. The only way I found relief, was pouring it out on paper. It did not take long, and I became known as the "Poet" and the "writer".

In the factory I had a woman Maister (I mentioned her before) Her niece was getting married, and she had to deliver a speech. She saw me writing on my breaks. She approached me, and asked me to write it for her. I was speechless. Since my German was good, I had no problem accommodating her. She was praised and congratulated on that wonderful speech.

Well I had a double reward . First this was a very big boost to my morale, not to mention those wonderful " Schnittchen" (Sandwiches) she kept bringing me. I wrote her a few more poems, for such occasions , such as Birthdays and Anniversaries. She was so kind and grateful .

This also came to a end. This good woman, was replaced, with a horror of a man. It must have been the dark S. S. woman's work.

This new master, was immediately called "Peiger". Which means "Skeleton". He was in his middle forties, medium height, very skinny, his eyes revealed so much horror. When he looked at you, you had the feeling that he wanted to choke you. While he was standing in front of you, white, actually more like yellow, and shaking his face and hat in all the directions, you got this feeling that he was going to consume you. His cold blue eyes penetrated into through to your insides. Everybody was terrified of him. This time she got a winner.

Many changes followed from then on. Things became much tougher, and life much harder.

One morning , we gathered for appeal, like usual, in even straight rows of five. The two S. S. womn, the camp leader, Bronka, and, of course, the camp Kapos. Bronka kept yelling, while swinging her thin stick, and dogs were running between rows. It was a real terror. They were awaiting a inspection from the regional Sturmband Fuhrer.

Finely the " Royal entourage " arrived. A jeep could be heard from the far. The gates opened, and they zoomed in without stopping for

identification. After all they were the "heroes", coordinators of our infernos. One of them, jumped out of the vehicle, opened the door and saluted, clicking with his high polished boots, " Heil Hitler" he shouted.

I still could not get used to this salute, it was repeated a hundred times, but it still gave me a pang in my heart.

The Sturmband Fuhrer was a middle age man, quite distinguished looking, tall and rather handsome. His impeccable uniform was adorned with endless ribbons and medals. Those were awards, for cruelty and mass murder to our people, for a job well done.

The "mighty man" with his entourage, plus the S.S. women, Bronka ,and the camp leader, of course, those vicious German shepherds, were conducting an inspection. Going from row to row, looking us over carefully. We were really very scared.

A very strange think happened, when they came to my row, the Sturmband Fuhrer stopped in front of me, and kept looking at me, I practically froze. By now the whole crew stopped and watched. We were over two thousand prisoners, why me? Well, nothing was said, no words exchanged, finally they moved on with their inspection.

Right fter the appeal , a Jewish Kapo came for me, and took me to the S. S. office. We were identified by numbers, mine was 2606 . I heard my number calling, while she was fetching me.

By now I was really petrified. This will be my end, instantly my mind was painting horror pictures, I was very good at it. (I want to live, so many dreams to fulfill, please don't let anything bad happen to me.)

Thank goodness I had my angel by my side, it was not as bad as I imagined it. The S. S. Woman was waiting for me, with a large pair of scissors in her hand. She started snipping off my dark brown long curls. I had still my long hair, to look neat, I used to wet and wrap it in to six long curls. Somehow nobody minded it, and it kept my hair in place.
Anyway, she had a field day. I was so afraid that she would cut my face. While she was cutting my hair, she was yelling and slapping me. When she let me go finally, I felt like I was saved again , for how long? Nobody knows. I went back from where I left off. Back to my dreams, back to my hopes, back to my secret confidant, my "Journal"

All my experiences , good or bad, were scribbled in a fat note book, which "the good woman master " gave me.

One of my friends, straightened out my chopped hair, and I took it as a special blessing. So much less to wash and groom, (not to mention our sessions, searching for lice .)

This old castle, had very primitive hygienic facilities. Every evening, after I came from work, I went straight to the wash basins, located in the lower part of the building. Rows and rows of clay basins that looked like urns for hay, to feed cows, or pigs. I used to sit in it, and scrub my body with soap, the water was ice cold, and I was shivering. I must admit, not everybody was so brave. I saw in my past experience, what happened to those poor boys in Spytkovice and Lazy. Dirt was the second big killer, sickness, and infections were spreading like wildfire.

Every Sunday, we were allowed a small wash bowl of warm water. This was rationed and distributed in the kitchen. Sunday our meal (soup) was served lunch time. In the evening the soup kettles were heating water, for our baths. I must tell you , it looked pathetic. Big line ups, you just could not see a end, we were standing patiently sometimes for two hours , or longer. When you finally got your water, you had to walk , like on pins and needles. Many times half of your treasure never got to the destination. An accidental little push, or a touch of a elbow, and here went your water.

With luck I made to it the top of my bunk. Well this was my home for sixteen months. In this little cubicle, almost the size of a coffin, I did all the living. There I would eat, dream, write, many times cry, talk to Guta, and do most of my little chores. Let me get back to my precious hot water. Till I got settled with the water in my " private quarters" the ritual started. First I washed my hair, with that horrible soap, next I washed my whole body with the help of a old worn wash cloth. After that

I washed my under wear, my socks (Shmates), and whatever was washable. Thank God I had a change of clothing, because , what was washed took forever to dry by the foot of my bunk. Next came the exciting part of the evening, the delousing. First I combed my hair thoroughly, with a special designed comb for this purpose. I was lucky I had this little comb, this was a priceless possession. After that Guta came into the picture. She would go through my hair inch by inch. Then, I did the same for her. The whole washing procedure may not seem very interesting or exciting, but to me it made a world of a difference.

After all that was done, we settled in for our feast. No matter how little, or what ever we had, was consumed with such a joy and relish. My stale and sticky bread, was like the best" Torte" the margarine was "caviar", the soup was a shear delicacy. At odd times, Guta and I savored such luxury as (horse) meat, this tasted like goose or duck.

One Sunday morning Bronka called a special roll call. We lined up, wondering what now?

Bronka was very gracious and generous, so it seemed. She called out, who wants to go to Reichenbach (the men's camp) should come forward. Many of the girls had relatives and boy friends in Reichenbach. A dozen of us girls came forward. My excitement was boundless. I will be able to see Lopek, how does he look? What will we say to each other? Bronka took one look at me, with her piercing eyes of a snake, she stretched out her hand, and gave me two strong blows in my face, knocking me straight to the ground. I still don't know why. She sent me to clean all the toilets instead. She probably thought I wanted to visit her cousin Srulek. I can't think of anything else.

Such a shame fell over me, a Jewish woman should be so heartless and cruel. She was riding on a tall horse, but one day, one day she will fall like all of us, and than we will stomp on her, like she is stomping on

us. The war will not go on forever, and when we survive, Bronka will have to face the survivors, and pay for her crimes.

Letters from Reichenbach kept coming less and less. The news we were getting was mixed. The good news was that the Germans were taking a beating , the bad news, was very consuming and devastating. We heard names like Auschwitz, Matthausen, Bergen Belsen, Gross Rosen, and many more death camps. We heard about gassing, burning, and inhuman torches. My mind could not comprehend it. This can not be true, people are exaggerating, they don't know what they are saying, building such rumors, those are lies, a bunch of lies.

Well, we wanted to fool each other, not to believe those horrible rumors, otherwise we just could not go on.

Changes in the plant came very rapidly. "Peiger" the master was selecting a group of girls every day to work on the roads and dig ditches. Those poor girls returned at night to the camp, with frozen feet and hands, they were a mess. Morally and physically crushed.

On one of such days, when " Peiger" was making his selection, a wild and risky idea came to my mind. I went over to him, and told him, with a begging voice, that he should select me for digging. I said, " I need fresh air, and I like more exercise". I looked him straight in the eyes, and only one God knows how frightened I was. His answer, was sheer heaven to me. "Nein, nein " no , no, he was yelling, " you rot here".

Hooray! I won the battle with the "Peiger"

One evening a Jewish Kapo came to our quarters, and started some switching around, relocating some of the girls. Guta and I were sent to a small room of about 18 girls. The room was beautiful in comparison to our previous lodging. It was very well lit, nice parquet floor, and only double bunks. Guta and I shared the two top bunks.

The girls in this room were also from Poland, they were very snobbish and had there own clique. We were strangers among them.

Somebody decided to go on a stealing rampage, after all,(two strangers in town), they will surely accuse the two new girls. This was exactly what happened. Guta and I were proclaimed thieves. I can't begin to tell you how deeply hurt I was, all I could do was cry silently, and spill my new

pain into the journal. I prayed and hoped the truth would surface.

One night, a girl by the name Ruth, caught a hand reaching out in the dark trying to steal the bread from under her mattress. She let her take the bread, than grabbed her arm, and started yelling," Light light I caught the thief".

It is hard to believe who stole the bread. The sweetest little girl, she was our age, dainty and delicate. A pretty face with sad brown eyes, I felt so sorry for her even though she had caused me so much pain. To do such act, she had to be pitied, not to be able to control herself. After all, most of us went to sleep hungry. Not in hundred years, would she be accused. She broke down, and admitted her nightly excursions. Thanks God, our names were cleared.

It came just very suddenly , nobody in camp was aware of it . All the" Stuben Kapos", were called to the Juden Elteste, and were given very strange orders. They returned with very grim and sad faces. We were ordered to gather all our belongings, " on the double, on the double ". We were commanded to assemble downstairs in the long corridor.

Big chaos in the room. We were all very frantic. I started gathering my wet laundry, little items like hair pins, tooth brush, and of course my journal which was becoming a real problem. I decided to bury it , with all the little trinkets, in the middle of my straw mattress, and pray they would not search the rooms.

We lined up in room order, it went by the numbers, and marched down the stairs. As we approached the long hallway, we saw line ups with stark naked bodies, walking towards a square large table. Behind the table were four S.S. men, young, tall, in impeccable uniforms adorned with medals. What is this charade? Do I have to be a part of it?.

They did not give me much time to think. Before I could size up the situation, I was pushed in to a nearby room, with the rest of the girls, from my room and all you could hear was get undressed, get undressed.

" Shnell , shnell. Quick, quick.

The " Schwarze Hexe" was yelling at the top of her voice.

I took my clothes off, with shaking hands, and dumped it on the pile of dresses, bras, panties, and all kinds of little treasures, which helped our sanity and survival. (It was a good thing I hid it in the mattress.)

We were walking now towards the table, Wagner's music was accompanying us. Naked bodies on exhibition, a market of living flesh. Our soul on burning coals. We were ordered to stop by the middle of the table where we were looked over from head to toe. They then pointed with the stick to the side, we had to turn around and than again to face the S. S. man.

Was this ever humiliating and degrading, they were poking us in our private parts. At that moment I wanted to be struck by lightning.

Two thousand young and beautiful bodies on display and at the mercy of those four young " Sadist's". They must hove gotten their kicks from that circus.

After that ordeal, nothing really mattered, we just wanted to get over with it.

Next step, the "Shearing crew" was waiting for us. Here our hair was scalped , my head was bleeding, I got a close shave. By the other table gray striped dresses, and wooden shoes were handed out . We were also sprayed with strong smelling stuff, we started coughing and choking. The " Grand Ball" was over, and we were send back to our rooms.

We looked at each other, and what we saw was a very ugly picture. We all looked the same, so gray, so pitiful, like straight from an asylum.

My treasures hidden in the straw mattress were recovered, and cherished , beyond words.

Life has to go on, you have to concentrate and think only of survival . There is no other way, otherwise , you go under and drown.

We started getting busy, (remodeling) our uniforms. We were cutting them short, and from the remnants, we made underwear, and kerchiefs, and our hair started growing slowly back.

The weather was still cold, and luckily a transport of winter coats arrived to our camp. This was a real joke, how the coats were distributed. The tall one got a short one, the short girl got a long one, one coat was warm, the other was thin. This started a new business, coat swapping .

My extra soup got me a better coat. There was always someone who new somebody who was working or had access to the clothing storage. Food could get you warm slacks, underwear, and many other luxuries.

Our correspondence kept circulating. The news was good. Soon it will be over. Every letter gave me new hope and the will to go on.

My diary was growing , what ever I felt, what ever I wanted to say and couldn't , went on paper. No wonder they say " paper is patient".

One Sunday afternoon, I was sitting on my bunk and doing my Sunday routine when Bronka charged in like a hurricane. She came straight to me , stretched out her hand , and ordered me to give her my diary. I was petrified, first I hesitated, (how did she know?), then I reached under the mattress, and with shaking hands I gave it to her.

To me this was the end. My life, my feelings, my love and compassion, my loneliness, my hopes and my fantasies were all there. The journal was my hide away, bitter tears and pain, marked the pages.

Good-by my best friend! Suddenly, I felt so alone, so deserted, so crushed. I cried myself to sleep and prayed to wake up from this bad nightmare.

Next day, when we came from the factory, Bronka came in to our room smiling. She gave me back my journal, and said " Very good, very good" " I didn't know you could write like this".

I was paralyzed, looking at her, with my mouth open. I could not believe what I was hearing. After all the mean thinks I wrote about her, didn't

she read it, didn't she care about the insults and offenses I was delivering against her? Maybe she was amused or even touched with my spilling of the truth?

All I cared about, was that to have my diary back, felt like getting my life back.

It was Monday, after work, on our way back to the camp we experienced what we called a " big miracle". The days were growing longer, and the wonderful smell of spring was in the air. The roads were dry, and the dirty snow was melted away. We were singing our famous songs, and suddenly out of nowhere, sirens started blowing full blast, and the sky was invaded by airplanes . All you could hear was, z z z z z z z whistling z z z z z around your head, I looked up and all I could think of was this is the end of us. Bombs started drooping, the planes came lower and lower practically above our heads. I bet you could practically reach out and touch them. If you believe in miracles, this was it .

The grenades, we called them" bombs " were directed towards the German guards, they were walking on the outside of the line. Three of them got killed, none of our two thousand prisoners got hit, or injured .

This was God's hand directing this attack. A lot of talk went on that night in the camp. The S. S. and the German guards were very threatened by it, and we again were giving thanks to the creator, for sparing our lives.

We found out later that those planes were American, and the Germans were being defeated.

Leibek's birthday was in April. For weeks I had been working on a small album. I got some brown fabric and did beautiful quilting on the cover with yellow embroidery thread that somebody gave me. I stitched out a sun with its rays, and wrote " The sun will shine again". The inside of the album was filled with lovely poems, and verses of hope and glorious tomorrows .

Leibek received the album through the kitchen connection, and he loved it.

It was only a month and five days, before liberation. We heard

rumors that Poland was liberated and occupied by the Russians, to us it still seemed very far away.

May 6th was a very chaotic day, a lot of commotion on the campsite. The S.S. women and the guards kept disappearing from their regular posts. Our washrooms were outside and many times at night, wrapped in my sleeping blanket, I had to make my way to the outhouse. That night, I could not believe what I saw. There were no guards on their usual posts. How was this possible? I looked in all directions, there was nobody around, except a few blanket covered creatures like me.

We did not sleep that night, signals went from bunk to bunk. We all started pushing towards the door. Consumed by curiosity we ran to the hall which was jammed with girls.

Suddenly a new flow of energy was taking over us. Some Jewish Kapos, tried to boss us around, like they were used to, no way , there was a strength with in us, which was not there before. No more ordering us around. We were touched by the breeze of freedom, there was no going back. We suddenly knew, if we opened those iron gates, the world would be ours to take.None of us slept . This was the longest and most exhilarated night in all those three years. We were drunk and high on the potion of life and glory. We all waited for the morning hour's to greet us, why are the minutes ticking so slowly.? Why does it seem to take forever?

What a unforgettable morning this was. May 7th , in all its splendor and glitter, arrived at our footsteps. The sun, of which we dreamed so many times, is finally ours to caress and warm our thin and undernourished bodies. We can look up to the blue sky, and say " What a wonderful day it is"," how great it is to be alive.

I could write for hours, how we felt, but no words in the world would be able to describe those magnificent and powerful emotions, which came over us. We thank you, Almighty, for giving us back our

lives and redeeming us from the enemy. We Thank you for keeping us alive and letting us witness such a great miracle.

I also gave my special thanks to my " guardian angel" who was always next to me, in times of hardship and danger, and miraculously redeemed me from disasters.

Before long, the iron gates were wide open. A procession of Jewish boys from Reichenbach were approaching the gates. What a joyous site this was, they came to claim their sweethearts, sisters, and relatives.

Among the crowd, I spotted Herman and Leibek. They came like they promised, to carry us out to freedom, to a new life.

We joined in hugs and kisses, the sweetest reunion of two young love birds, whose wings were clipped, and forbidden to fly. At last we were liberated. Out of the cage, the birds can fly again, above the clouds, to the sunrise, to the sunset, to all those mysterious places life has to offer.

Not everyone was so happy. Between the crowd , far in the corner, was Jean Pierre watching me. His face was sad and twisted with pain. I slowly approached him, he took me in his arms, called me sweet names, tears were streaming from our eyes . I thanked him for helping me in time of need, being my friend, and giving me so much support and strength. I begged his forgiveness if I ever misled him. I told him " Us two can never be one, we are two different worlds." We kissed good by, and promised , never EVER TO FORGET.

Leibek and I walked away together, to the new world, to the promise of tomorrow...